

**Basics of METER** [the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in lines of accentual poetry]

**Why does meter matter?**

Anyone who listens carefully to poetry appreciates the music in it. Also, poets can't read their poems aloud to everyone, so they have to rely on what can be transmitted through the visual representation of the voice. The "music" of poetry has to be there on the page.

**What are the basic rhythms?**

Briefly, they correspond to the basic emotions. Fast rhythms are more excited, happy, funny, or angry; slow rhythms are more serious, grave, sad etc. Staggering rhythms are more ironic, humorous, grotesque, or pained etc.

**WHAT CREATES AND/ OR REPRESENTS DIFFERENT RHYTHMS (AND THE PACE) IN POETRY?**

**DICTION** – choosing words carefully is important for rhythm. Single syllable words run more slowly than polysyllabic words. Often the most serious emotions are conveyed convincingly in simple words. When King Lear laments his daughter's death, for example, he cries out, "Why should a dog, a rat, a flea, have life / and not thee?"

Also words with many consonants and/or complex vowels run more slowly than simple words. Try saying "squinched" as many times as you can in five seconds. Then try the same with "what."

**LINEATION**, using varying line lengths, line-breaks, enjambment, endstopping etc.

**METER** – most importantly, deciding on a certain meter in a line sets the pace.

**WHAT ARE THE BASIC METRICAL FEET?** (NOTE: Every metrical foot has one stress)

**iamb**            ˘ /        [iambic rhythms are slower in general]

                  ˘ /   ˘ /   ˘ /   ˘ /   ˘ /  
e.g. "That time of year thou may'st in me behold..."  
[iambic pentameter i.e. a five-foot line, from W. Shakespeare "Sonnet 73"]

**trochee**        / ˘        [trochaic rhythms run faster than iambs]

                  / ˘   / ˘   / ˘   /  
e.g. "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright

                  / ˘   / ˘   / ˘   /  
In the forests of the night..."

[W. Blake's opening couplet to "The Tyger" has an extra stress at the end of each line, which makes the lines even more emphatic and excited. These lines would be four-foot lines or trochaic tetrameter with a missing unstressed syllable at the ends of the lines.]

How would you scan this line? "The future isn't what it used to be."

One-foot lines are **monometer**, two-foot lines are **dimeter**, three-foot lines are **trimeter**, four-foot lines are **tetrameter**, five-foot lines are **pentameter**, six-foot lines are **hexameter** or **alexandrines**, and fourteen-syllable lines, which are very rare, are **"fourteeners"** or **heptameter**.

